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SUBJECT: PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT VISITS YEMEN, BUT LITTLE BUZZ

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Palestinian President visited Yemen on June 19 and met with President Saleh to discuss the Arab-Israeli issue and Yemen's initiative to reconcile Fatah and Hamas. Open source reporting said little about the discussions and insiders told PolOff that no substantive developments came from the meetings. End Summary.

12. (U) On June 19, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visited Yemen and met with President Ali Abdullah Saleh and other high-ranking Yemeni officials. The ostensible purpose of the visit was to discuss Yemen's initiative to reconcile Fatah and Hamas. Newspapers reported very little of substance about the visit, providing lists of meetings and platitudes.

13. (C) Palestinian Deputy Chief of Mission Fayez Abdul Jawad told PolOff on June 25 that President Abbas came to Yemen with two messages. First, to update a fellow Arab President on developments in the Arab-Israeli relationship, highlighting incursions into the West Bank and Israeli settlements. The second point was to discuss the Yemeni initiative of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. Abdul Jawad said that reconciliation depended on Hamas, noting that Hamas would have to (1) pull back their control in the Gaza Strip, (2) recognize the Palestinian Liberation Organization as the legitimate representatives of the Palestinian people, including in the Arab League and (3) recognize the Arab League initiatives and all prior international treaties and agreements on the Arab-Israeli issue. Abdul Jawad was not optimistic that any of this would happen soon or that concrete results would come out of the visit to Yemen. He cited former President Carter's meeting with Hamas and Egypt's aid and support to Gaza as sending mixed signals to Hamas, reducing the pressure Hamas might feel to comply. Abdul Jawad pulled PolOff aside and confided that Hamas had a strong following in Yemen, especially within the Islah political party and with cleric and Imam University President Abdul-Majid al-Zindani.

14. (C) Yemeni Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Two Americas Desk First Secretary Abdullah al-Socotry told PolOff on June 22 that MFA colleagues had told him that discussions had been encouraging in bringing Fatah and Hamas together and that Yemen requested assurances from both Palestinian factions that they would not become involved in further fighting with Israel. Al-Socotry added that there were factions within both Palestinian groups that might not agree with the Yemeni initiative.

15. (C) Ruling General People's Congress party Foreign Policy Committee Chair Mohammed Abulahoum told PolOff on June 22 that the visit was ceremonial and no concrete initiatives would result from it. He added that currently the pressure and action on the Arab-Israeli issue was coming from Egypt. He commented that Yemen had internal problems which undermined its ability to extend its influence, and that Yemen's peace efforts were attempts to distract Yemenis from domestic issues.

SECHE